

## T.J. Bradley coordinates 2022 Alabama Institute for Recovery, emphasizes 'A Hero's Journey'

After a two-year hiatus because of the COVID pandemic, the Alabama Institute for Recovery (AIR) returned to Shocco Springs on April 18, 2022. According to AIR coordinator T.J. Bradley, it was a welcome reward for consumers all across the state.

"So many people were isolated and alone during the pandemic so it was really great to see people out having fun again," Bradley said. "Because of lingering COVID restrictions and limitations, we were only able to have about half of our usual number, so there were around 400 people there. What I saw is that people came away with renewed hope from the event. I know everyone enjoyed it. In my job at JBS, I was able to talk to a lot of people who live in the group homes who were able to go and it was good for them to all see each other again. The conference schedule ran in its traditional pattern, but we incorporated the theme of A Hero's Journey. That worked out really well."

That "traditional pattern" of events goes back more than 3 decades, and it has entertained and educated tens of thousands of Alabama consumers

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## Alabama Warm Line enters fifth year, expands to 24-7

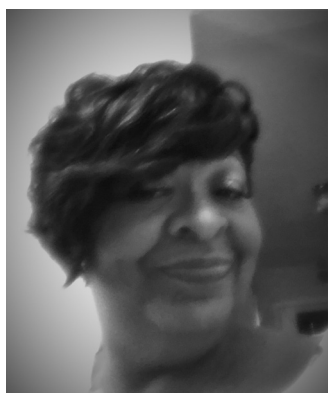
In January of 2017, Wings Across Alabama began the operation of a statewide peer support line, the Alabama Warm Line. People who need someone to talk to about overwhelming feelings, loneliness, stigma, issues with relationships, and much more, can call this free, confidential number and speak with a trained Warm Line Specialist. The number is 844-999-4647.



Each Warm Line Specialist is an Alabama Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) and has received additional training on answering the Warm Line. Ann Conner, the Warm Line Coordinator, explained the line is funded by the Alabama Department of Mental

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## Pam Butler retires from Office of Peer Programs



On April 1, 2022, after ten years of service, Pam Butler retired as Coordinator of Recovery Support Services in the Office of Peer Programs, Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Her hard work and dedication led to a number of successes including the creation of the first substance use disorder peer organization, Recovery Community Centers (RCC); assisting in the ROSS Recovery Center, being awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020; helping to establish the first substance use disorder peer-run 24-hour Helpline; and ensuring statewide peer outreach services in 53 counties was established.

Butler worked closely with recovery communities, advocate groups, faith-based community coalitions, substance abuse consumers and their family members, prisons, court offices, universities, and other community stakeholders.

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over the years. The conference typically starts with a talent show and music events on the first night following an opening plenary session which this year included welcoming remarks from Associate Commissioner Dr. Tammie McCurry and ADMH Commissioner Kimberly Boswell. Geneva McManus, who was a fixture at the conference and annual host of the talent show until she moved to north Carolina ten years ago, made the trip from North Carolina to join us and host the talent show. She humored us with her corny jokes.

The opening session also includes presentation of the annual RESPECT Awards, and this year's winners are listed elsewhere in this issue. The first day also included the Wings "Thrival Empowerment Story Program."

Throughout the conference, the Wings art exhibit is on display, the ever-popular Free Yard Sale is on, and trainings to both educate and empower consumers are offered.

For the early risers, Melanie Evans and Jennifer Goggins started Tuesday with the "Morning Walk with Friends" at 6:30 prior to breakfast and two tremendous key note presentations. The first keynote was from Dr. Nadia Richardson, entitled "Neurodivergence is your Super Power." The second, from nationally-renowned consumer/psychiatrist Dr. Dan Fisher, was entitled "Heartbeats of Hope." Please see the profile of this compelling professional in a separate article in this issue.

## Workshops educate and inspire

A series of workshops usually takes up the afternoon of the second day, and this year was no exception. There were lots of them, and Bradley felt they worked well on several fronts.

"Our workshops this year were lots of fun," he said. "Art therapy is good and good for you, and people just loved the rock

painting workshop. That one was led by Melanie Evans, who also led our morning walks, along with Bess Welton. As they pointed out, it's relaxing, it's fun, it's creative. What more could you want?"

There were also a series of workshops directly or indirectly relating to COVID and its aftereffects. With demand for labor at an all-time high, the Financial Literacy and Wellness presentation was especially relevant. Led by seasoned financial experts Jamie Hudson, Lamont Lavender, Dee Mayhew, and Leah Siway, it taught consumers not only the basics of financial literacy but also financial wellness, benefits planning, and the

Social Security Administration's Work Incentive Programs.

A related workshop entitled Importance of Employment explored the relationship between employment and recovery. Nearly a dozen professionals and peer specialists emphasized the Department's Employment First focus and ways to succeed and thrive in the workplace.

In a different realm of COVID aftereffects, Dr. Dan Fisher led a workshop entitled Healing the Trauma of COVID Pandemic by Emotional CPR. In his presentation he described how emotional CPR has helped his continued growth as well as that of others. "It may be a gift by the consumer movement to the chronically normal society," Fisher declared.

Depression was definitely part of the pandemic which led many to self-medicate, often with deadly results. Naloxone Training, presented by Jefferson County Department of Health staffers Sarah Howell and Candace Rachel helped attendees learn how to recognize an opioid overdose and how to respond. Free naloxone kits were provided.

"In addition to loving my superheroes, I am passionate about suicide prevention," Bradley said. "Cheryl Dotson's presentation on QPR Suicide Prevention emphasized the three simple steps anyone can learn: Question, Persuade, Refer. It's crucial that we know the warning signs for suicide and know what to do to save lives."

Peer involvement and leadership has changed everything about the mental health system, and Wings Across Alabama CPS Peer Support Groups presentation helped those in attendance learn what it's all about. Led by Mark Prescott. He focused on "Social Anxiety and Rejoining Society after COVID." These strategies included coping skills, stress management techniques,

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and how to use support groups to help.

Likewise, the Introduction to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Peer Programs presented by Christi Collins, Leigh Few, and Mark Prescott, introduced peers to various NAMI classes and how to get involved. All of the classes are free and provide another good avenue for involvement. There were separate workshops on specifics from these overviews, including In Our Own Voice and Connections Recovery Support Group. These deeply personal workshops shared presenters' stories, coping strategies, and worked to change ideas about people with mental health conditions. All presenters are experienced leaders in these programs. "NAMI programs has made a very big difference in my life since 2017, they have really helped with my recovery," Bradley said.

Valeria Cotchery and LaTasha Thomas explored another important issue in their workshop entitled Physical and Intimate Relationships: How to Stay Safe and Healthy. Its purpose was to share education and information on signs and symptoms, testing and treatment and ways to prevent STDs.

"On a different and lighter note, I especially like the Sci-Fi Society and Superhero Social since that hit on our theme and is my personal passion," Bradley said. "Led by Jessica Hales, and Jeff Mitchell, it was basically a way to get sci-fi fans in the same room for some cosplay fun and action. Very cool."

In the area of recovery, there was plenty to learn. The Respect Initiative—Our Personal Journey, featured "personal, intense, and real" stories from presenters Jennifer Goggins, Emily Jackson, and Jeff Mitchell, all Respect Initiative graduates. They shared how they learned to heal, reclaim their sense of self, and live a life of recovery they did not think was possible.

In the realm of our civic duties, Zina May, Maddy Ard, and Nicky Watkins engaged participants in how to register to vote, and what to expect at the polls on voting day. They also explored involuntary commitment and voting rights.

**So much information was out there and we are super fortunate to have such great, talented, and experienced presenters. We appreciate them very much.**

After all of this information, much of it life changing and serious, Steven Strickland, Bud Smith, and Wiley Waters invited everyone to Go Fishing! The lake at Shocco provides the perfect opportunity to relax and then tell a few "fish tales" over dinner.

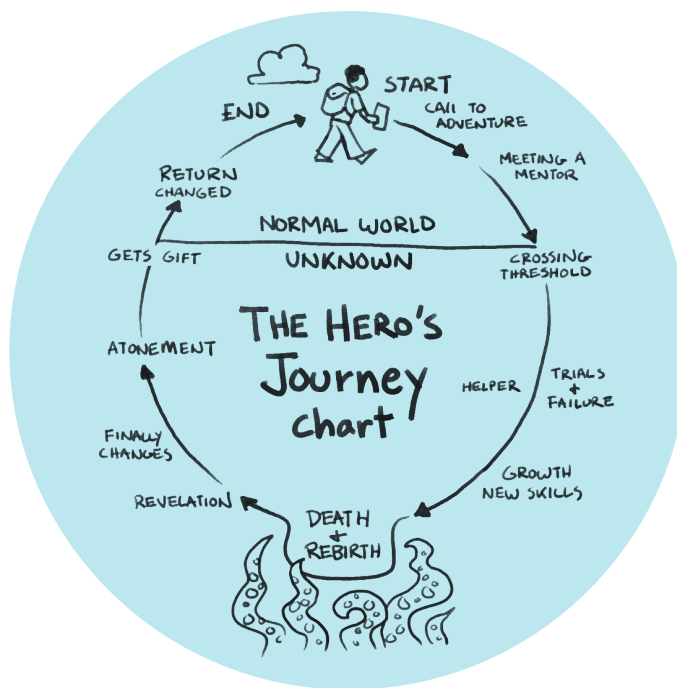
"The workshops were really just a great success," Bradley concluded. "So much information was out there and we are super fortunate to have such great, talented, and experienced

presenters. We appreciate them very much."

## Night time is the right time

After such invigorating workshops and another wonderful dinner, everyone had the opportunity to reflect on those we have left behind at the Candlelight Vigil, which this year was centered around the beautiful poem by Charisse Parker that is featured in a companion story in this issue.

"There was a good vibe when she read her poem," Bradley said. "Charisse incorporated the idea of the Hero's Journey and focused on those we love who for different reasons couldn't be here. We especially remembered those who have passed away,



great leaders in our movement like Paul Carlson, Fannie Hicks, and William Ruff. We missed them terribly."

David Thames played his guitar. Christi Collins, Nick Snead, Alicia Calloway and Phil Pearson guided everyone into putting their candles into the barrels.

"I mentioned earlier that suicide prevention is one of my callings. I myself have lost a lot of people to suicide, especially those in the LGBTQ community. It's why I do what I do. I always try to remember those who did not make it, including George Reeves, who played the first Superman on television. He had it all but fell victim to suicide. It can happen to anyone. So yes, the candlelight vigil was very good and very moving."

Then comes the fun, when a DJ spins the platters and the dancing begins. The night was beautiful, the refreshments were good, and it's just a place for everyone to feel free and let it go

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for a few hours. That definitely happened up on the hill. For the non-dancers there are plenty of other opportunities, including the annual jam session and sing-along in Bagley Center and the fun game of Wingo. Something for everyone.

After breakfast on the final day of the conference, consumer leaders Charisse Parker, Brian K. Smith, Amanda Deason, and James Tucker, Director of the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), led a panel on Living in the Community: A Realistic Look at Community Inclusion from the Peer Perspective.



As we all know, there are particular obstacles facing those with mental illness when it comes to community inclusion. The panel acknowledged these unfair situations, but addressed ways to live and express your rights while working toward recovery. The goal is change the mental health landscape here and across the land.

Before it all wound down there was a chance for lucky ticket holders to win fabulous raffle prizes and then strut their stuff. There's no better way to end a great three days.

"Obviously, this was a huge undertaking but I was honored to be asked to lead the coordination for so many people," Bradley said. "I had tons of help from all over. People like Marie Holliday, Nick Snead and Christi Collins were always there. Our keynote and workshop presenters were beyond great. Mike and Nick from the Office of Peer Programs were great. But they let us handle it. They walk the walk when it comes to believing in us. They are always cool."

Bradley also elaborated on the theme, A Hero's Journey.

"The idea there is that you are a normal person when the thing kicks off, but by the end you have learned new techniques and acquired superhero traits. These traits will help with relationships and they will help with recovery. It's how the superhero genre works. You're called into an adventure and get help along the way – in our case from therapists and doctors along with friends and peers -- and then you transform by learning new skills. So when you leave and go back you're not the same as before. It worked out just like we hoped!"

He said he'd do it all over again.

"Look. I was worried. I am a little bit of a perfectionist. But I felt great at the end and everyone seemed happy. I learned a lot and for me it was a great personal experience. Thanks to everyone who was there to make it all come true."

Prior to joining the department, Butler worked with Substance Use Disorder Treatment Providers, UAB TASC – Jefferson County Drug Court as the Treatment Coordinator from 2008 to 2013, and Aletheia House as a Substance Abuse Counselor from 2002 to 2013.

Butler has been in long-term recovery for over 29 years. She has worked in substance use disorder services in different capacities for more than 26 years as well as actively participating and promoting recovery in the community. Butler is the Director of Zoe Helpful, a recovery support agency providing trainings, consulting, and recovery coaching services. She is dedicated to the promotion of individual driven, evidence-based, recovery focused, easily accessible substance use services for all those in need.

Pam, thank you for your service and congratulations on a well-deserved retirement.

Health through Wings Across Alabama and serves the entire state.

"Research has demonstrated that Warm Lines are a very effective resource for individuals experiencing overwhelming feelings that might otherwise use emergency services, or, at worst, not have any accessible resources," Conner said. "The most

### Research has demonstrated that Warm Lines are a very effective resource for individuals experiencing overwhelming feelings

important aspect of peer-operated warm lines is that the people answering the calls have been through similar experiences and can use that experience to better understand the callers. In addition to personal experience, it is essential that Warm Line Specialists have a solid foundation of peer support principles such as mutuality, listening skills, cultural competence, crisis as an opportunity for growth, strengths-based perspective and respectful sharing of one's own story. They know that one of the most important communication skills is listening with empathy and unconditional acceptance and letting the callers know that they have been heard."

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Conner was hired in 2018 to develop the Warm Line in Alabama after seven years of experience operating a line in Virginia. Her first point of emphasis was establishing written policies and procedures, expanding data collection, and training the Warm Line Specialists. There were only two such specialists when she began, and they were only on call 40 hours a

week. That expanded to 49 hours the next year – seven hours a day for all seven days of the week – before achieving her ultimate goal of being there for callers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“Three months ago we were able to hire our first Warm Line Director, Charisse Parker, and she has done an excellent job. She is not only a great communicator and empathetic listener, she is also very adept with emerging technology which is a huge help. In addition to Charisse and myself, we have eight other peers who work with us. They are all outstanding, caring people who bring their own experiences to the job.”

“As we prepared to make the move to 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we brought in the Copeland Center, consultants who specialize in Warm Lines,” Conner said. “They actually developed the WRAP best-practices methodology, an acronym for Wellness Recovery Action Plan. That training was excellent but it didn’t satisfy me so I added an additional eight hours of role play training, which I believe helped our team very much.”

Either Conner or Parker are always on call for the eight specialists in case they have any questions or need a specific type of support.

“We get a lot of calls asking for advice. Callers want us to tell them how to deal with a particular situation, or how to live their life in general. But we don’t give advice. We listen. Our job is to help the caller realize what they themselves want and need. They are the experts on themselves, and not anyone else. So in the end, it’s more about being a great listener, caring about the caller, and letting them figure out their own situation.”

Warm Lines often create a special connection.

**So in the end, it’s more about being a great listener, caring about the caller, and letting them figure out their own situation.**

“Our Warm Line Specialists provide support and a listening ear without judgment or criticism to all callers, whether they identify as an individual with mental health challenges or not,” Director Parker added. “We connect on a human level. We do not force callers into boxes or labels. This is one of the many gifts that the Alabama Warm Line offers through our free, confidential, non-crisis peer support. We focus on support while proving that the Wings Across Alabama motto rings true—‘Together We Thrive.’”

“We all need someone to talk to,” Conner concluded. “Alabama’s Warm Line gives peers a special place to go and talk to people who have been in their shoes. We are honored to be there for our fellow Alabamians.”

For more information visit [WingsAcrossAL.org](http://WingsAcrossAL.org)

## ***Listen . .***

*When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.*

*When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.*

*When I ask you to listen to me and you say you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as that may seem.*

*Listen! All I asked was that you listen ... not talk or do,*

*Just hear me.*

—Anonymous

# Charisse Parker overcomes challenges, inspires others to do so

Charisse Parker, who serves as a valued peer mentor to Alabama's mental health consumers, composed and read a poem at the 2022 AIR conference's Candlelight Vigil at Shocco Springs. Her platform that recovery is possible for everyone is the essence of her daily life and work. She speaks from the heart, but she also speaks from experience as her own road to recovery has been full of setbacks.



"I am a native of Jackson, Alabama in Clarke County, known to many of us as LA (Lower Alabama)," she said. "I was born into a wonderful family of educators. My grandfather was a school principal and I just had wonderful people around me on both sides of my family."

Parker's parents married young. When Charisse was born her mother was in college so her grandparents asked if she could live with them, which she did. Despite such a supportive and nurturing environment, she struggled from an early age.

"Looking back, I now realize that because of my mental health challenges I had an abandonment complex," Parker said. "My grandmother passed away in 1984 when I was six years old and that just added to the trauma. I cried and cried and moved in with my mom and stepfather. My parents had divorced many years prior. My step dad played for the Green Bay Packers so we lived in Wisconsin during the fall and were back in Birmingham in the off-season. I was in the gifted class in Green Bay, and the Alabama

schools were a bit behind where we were up there. The curriculum was slower, so my transition was difficult."

During the off-season, the family settled into a comfortable lifestyle in Vestavia Hills. In her diverse high school, the middle-class Charisse was accused of being stuck up by the kids from the inner city. Very shy, she was unable to explain and remained misunderstood by her peers who were bussed in. They looked like her but did not take the time to get to know her.

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During her teen years, Parker began searching for something outside of the comfort she knew. She ran away from home.

"I went from my safe, loving home in Vestavia to the one of the roughest parts of Birmingham, Ensleys' Brickyard," she said. "It was bad over there. I started using drugs and alcohol and began living the life of a little gangster and got caught with a gun. I was sent to boot camp. I quit high school and got my GED and enrolled in community college. I didn't go to class. When my mother sought help for me at local psychiatric facilities, I was viewed as a spoiled brat instead of a youth needing treatment. They didn't see the pain I was experiencing or recognize the symptoms of what I now know to be manic depression (bipolar disorder). When the mental illness remained untreated, things went downhill fast."

Parker had little sense of what was going on, and found herself with a new baby boy just before she turned 18. She returned to Clarke County and got married in 1996. Her husband adopted the baby as his own, joined the military in 1999, and was sent to a duty station in Germany. By this time the couple had a third child, Parker took the children and flew to Germany on Mother's Day 2000 where she and her husband had another child in 2002.

"I loved being in Germany but I was having issues," Parker said. "I carried over my substance abuse problems from back in the States, and in Germany I took pills and tried to take my own life. I went to a psychiatrist but with opposition to help from my husband I still did not receive the treatment I needed. We separated in 2004. My oldest son, age 9, flew back to the States with him and went to live with my father and stepmother while I stayed in Germany with our other three children who were 7, 5 and 2 years old. I began leading a wild, reckless life, feeling free for the first time. I returned to the States in 2005 where things went from bad to worse. I went to Boston to be with my mom and try to get my life together, but instead I ran away once again from love and safety seeking something to fill that God-sized void."

**When things were as bad as they could be, I finally found a place that cared: JBS Mental Health Authority Homeless Outreach.**

Parker's turbulent life continued to swing wildly from one bad decision to another, but she knew by now that something was wrong with her. She tried to get help from a mental health center in 2006, shortly after the birth of her fifth child, but was told she was just there to try and get a disability check.

"It felt like a balloon had burst," she said. "I knew I needed help. I experienced homelessness, crack cocaine addiction, and all the darkness that those struggles led to. I lost everything, and ended up back in Birmingham in a drunken stupor where I entered a homeless shelter. When things were as bad as they could be, I finally found a place that cared: JBS Mental Health Authority Homeless Outreach."

Through the JBS Mental Health Homeless Outreach program Parker began to stabilize. She got on meds that helped her, worked on her substance abuse problem, and began helping others with their treatment regimens for a year after she herself was a resident at Fellowship House, Inc., a local drug treatment facility.

"I was the intake case manager when I left there in 2015, and had the most wonderful experience. The director told me about peer support and I went to a training session where I was introduced to that world and began working part-time at JBS. Although I would still face challenges in the future, that connection was a crucial part of what saved me."

Her challenges included drug relapses, but she had built a solid work record as the youth peer specialist team leader for JBS Youth Peer Project. The job allowed her to provide support for youth who were the same age as her own children whom she had been prevented from seeing because of her poor choices in the past. She experienced homelessness again, but through her church Parker went to a life transformation program and marked September 24, 2018 as the last day she found it necessary to use illegal substances and she began to really focus on recovery.

Through her previous work connections at JBS, Parker landed a full-time salaried position as the Youth Peer Coordinator and eventually moved into working with adults as JBS Adult Peer Services Team Leader. She achieved these goals in part through the mentorship of Alabama peer stalwart Marie Holliday.

"I had no car, so Marie, who already drove an hour to work daily, went out of her way, twice a day, to get me to and from work for a month. Because of my new focus on recovery and by

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the grace of God I thrived in my work and became increasingly involved in the Alabama consumer movement, becoming recertified as a peer support specialist in early 2019, as well as a RESPECT Initiative speaker, NAMI In Our Own Voice (IOOV) Facilitator, and an Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery (APPR) Facilitator. Then COVID hit.”

She continued working and although it took her two years, Parker did re-earn her certified recovery support specialist credentials along with hope and even greater opportunities. She was able to get her own house and reconnect with her children on a deeper level at age 43, by which time she was also blessed with two grandsons, Wyatt and Aiden.

Parker is deeply involved with the statewide Wings organization as an APPR Facilitator, Community Support Group Facilitator when needed, and she was hired as the Director of The Alabama Warm Line in March 2022. She also serves as chair of the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council and is a Trainer for the Alabama Certified Peer Specialist Training.

Her biggest cheerleader and supporter, who has always been there for her through every obstacle, is her mother who is now a Pastor and psychologist, who she affectionately refers to as Dr. Moma. Parker knows that none of this would have been possible without her mother’s love, support and most of all, her prayers.

“I have launched my own blog – Bama Recovery Girl – and my mantra is that ‘Recovery Is Possible- I am Proof!’ I believe that is true for everyone. I am proof of that. In the midst of my pain and disappointment with myself and others, I must remember that what is true for me is true for others. Some of my children have experienced mental health struggles and I know from both my personal and professional experiences that it is difficult just being young and learning about life, so I am patient and accepting of them, and their challenges as well. I stand on the platform that recovery is possible. That’s what my life is all about.”

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**I stand on the platform that recovery is possible. That’s what my life is all about.**

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## Inspiration for poem came from others

As consumers across the state know so well, the Alabama Institute for Recovery (AIR) annual gathering is central to the state’s recovery movement. The Shocco Springs event was canceled by COVID in both 2020 and 2021, so the anticipation of 2022 was huge. It certainly was for Parker.

“Prior to the conference, T.J. Bradley asked me to write a poem to recite at the Candlelight Vigil,” Parker said. “As I was driving into Shocco I saw several vans from JBS. I smiled. I saw right away that these people had not been anywhere for so long because of COVID. So many people were limited by the pandemic and rendered hopeless, but these vans inspired me. Right away I knew what to write because I was so joyful, so hopeful. Of course I knew lots of these people, and seeing them surrounded by friends was just wonderful. Even for those people I had never met my heart went out to them. So I just sat down and started writing. I thought about people who used to be there who were no longer with us. I especially remembered those like me with a dual diagnosis who lost their lives and would have loved to be there and be well but just did not have that opportunity. But I

also saw who did make it and my heart was full. As a result, I completed the poem that first night. I was inspired thinking of what we have overcome in our individual struggles but also in our collective challenges. The conference theme, a Hero’s Journey, inspired me as well. It was all so very powerful.”

Parker said she was also remembering where she herself had been just three years earlier when she was



pulled from the ashes by Marie Holliday because of the hope held by Audrey Trippe. She reflected on her present blessings, her church family, and the love and support of her five children, grandchildren and especially her mother.

“This poem was a small way for me to give voice to those who no longer have a voice,” she said. “Someone was there for me at my lowest point, and I felt the presence of those who had helped me but were no longer with us. These experiences, these memories, they are what keep me going. Recovery is possible for everyone. I am proof of that.”



# *Heroes Flame*

Written & Lived by Charisse D. Parker

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*As we all stand here together  
You standing next to me  
Remembering this candlelight vigil  
For two years we did not see*

*As we watch the flames flicker  
Reminiscing of years gone by  
Although we all are joyful  
Tears still may fill our eyes*

*Our theme is a hero's journey  
A journey that we all have begun  
Yes, each one of us are heroes  
For many battles we have won*

*We have overcome oh so much  
And still much more to face each day  
Just because we've been heroic  
That doesn't take the pain away*

*Please know that you are much stronger  
Than you ever thought you'd be  
We made it here to Shocco  
Though in 2020 we could not see*

*Yes we've lost some dear friends  
And we remember them tonight  
Though saddened by their absence  
Heroes must continue the fight*

*Keep fighting for your rights to live  
Keep fighting to be free  
But most of all keep fighting  
For recovery for you and me*

*You made it yet another day  
Despite tears and broken hearts  
We made it yet another year  
Despite COVID keeping us apart*

*So since we've made it here and now  
Never forget what hope can do  
As you remember that recovery is possible  
Because the true hero is YOU!*

*Take this time to look around  
Realizing where you are  
Taking the road less traveled  
Whether by van, airplane or car*

*Realizing all of the many obstacles  
That we've all already overcome  
Realizing our recovery journeys  
Have only just begun*

*Realizing our heroes journeys  
Are what binds is all together  
Pressing our way through the storm  
Regardless of the weather*

*We are all here celebrating recovery  
At the AIR Conference this year  
Mindful to hold on tightly  
To these memories we hold dear*

*So as you prepare to go home  
Take one last moment to look around  
On your left and on your right  
And inside YOU the true heroes we have found!*

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## Bradley's struggles made him stronger, led him to peer programs



TJ Bradley, who grew up in Clanton and Birmingham, had a difficult childhood.

"I was abused in every-way as a child, from age five until I was 13," he said. "As a result, I developed complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorders along with major depression and anxiety. I married, but family deaths and divorce led to a breakdown and suicidal thoughts. I checked into a hospital, after I got out of the hospital I found NAMI and that is where I started my peer work."

It's not that Bradley had not found success in the world of academics and business. He graduated from the University of Montevallo and had a high-paying job at AT&T. But after the breakdown he medically retired. He was 37 years old.

"Prior to that, I had no clue about the peer world," he said. "I found NAMI and took all the trainings I could. I just wanted to help the peers I had met in the hospital. These peers were like me: successful business people, doctors, IT specialists, lawyers, college professors, people from all walks of life. When you leave

the hospital you get a few months of a therapy plan and some meds, but they don't tell you about peer groups."

His involvement deepened when he attended his first Alabama Institute for Recovery at Shocco Springs in 2018. He attended workshops and met some people from the statewide group Wings.

"I went the next year and helped my friend Paul Carlson with the conference photos. What a guy he was. Amazing man. Then COVID hit and there were no conferences for two years. When Thomas McCorkle called and asked me to coordinate this year's conference I didn't know what to say. But I had a lot of help and it went really well."

In addition to coordinating the 2022 AIR, Bradley is the co-chair of the ADAP PAIMI (Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness) advisory council and second Vice President on the NAMI Alabama Peer Leadership Council. He is an IOOV presenter and Connections Support Group facilitator for NAMI, APPR facilitator for Wings, Respect Initiative speaker, a QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper, board member for ASPARC (Alabama Suicide Prevention & Resources Coalition), and a State of Alabama CPS trainer.

"Obviously I am deeply involved in our movement and thank my peers for being there with me every day. I am in the process of relocating from Birmingham to Mobile to work with AltaPointe's crisis center so I am excited. Like Superman, you never know what your next adventure will be! I am definitely answering that call to adventure."

Like Superman, you never know what your next adventure will be! I am definitely answering that call to adventure.

# Alabama crisis centers provide ‘right care, right time, right place’

Anthony Reynolds, a Licensed Professional Counselor who enjoyed a long career with Bradford Health Services, entered a second career recently with the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) to direct the state’s Crisis Care Program.

“Our commissioner at the time, Lynn Beshear, knew about the need for crisis centers in our state,” Reynolds explained. “Her idea was that these centers could be open for people to just walk in any time. There is no wrong door. If you are in a substance use or mental health crisis, you can be assessed and admitted then and there. It’s a genuine way to address mental health crises. We hear politicians talk about the need to address mental health in the country, and that is exactly what we are doing in these crisis centers.”

In 2020, the state legislature appropriated funding for three centers and added a fourth in the last year. This year, the department was able to add two more centers to bring the total to six, which covers all regions of the state. The centers are individualized to the unique needs of the communities they serve.

“Late this year, we will have two centers in the Jefferson County and Tuscaloosa area, where our population is heaviest,” Reynolds said. “We also have operational centers in Mobile, Huntsville, and Montgomery and will add one in Dothan in 2023.”

“These are all state-of-the-art facilities. Governor Ivey, the state legislature, and Commissioner Boswell have done an excellent job to kick start and sustain funding for our centers. This is a nationwide crisis and these centers are an excellent way to address the situation.”

One of the stated purposes of the Alabama Crisis System of Care addresses three needs: someone to call, someone to respond, and someplace to go.

Someone to call is 988. On July 16, 2022, 988 became the national three-digit phone number for all mental health, substance use, and suicide crises. The 988 calls will be routed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline centers in each state, transitioning from the Lifeline number, 1-800-273-8255.

Someone to respond is mobile crisis.

“Our counselors are going out as mobile teams into the community,” Reynolds said. “The goals for mobile crisis services are aligned with the overarching goals of crisis care, which are to reduce the burden on hospitals and emergency departments, reduce the burden on law enforcement and jails, and improve access for the ‘right care, right time, right place.’”



The community mental health centers may also include in their crisis services a co-response with law enforcement and emergency medical personnel, crisis peer support, crisis case management, and respite options.

Someplace to go is the Crisis Centers.

“Within the centers, our staffing is peer heavy. We highly recommend that these facilities hire peers. As experience has proven time and time again, peers can talk to each other in ways no one else can do.”

“I am proud of Alabama. I have 40 years of experience in mental health counseling and this system is addressing a huge crisis on a large scale. This is a chance to make a big difference in Alabama communities, as well as a difference in the lives of individuals and families who are experiencing a mental health crisis.”

**This system is addressing a huge crisis on a large scale. This is a chance to make a big difference in Alabama communities, as well as a difference in the lives of individuals and families who are experiencing a mental health crisis.”**

To learn more, including specific locations of the centers, visit [www.mh.alabama.gov/crisis-system-care/](http://www.mh.alabama.gov/crisis-system-care/)

# Dan Fisher returns to Alabama, keeps recovery in the forefront



In the earliest days of the Alabama consumer recovery movement, starting about 1992, the Alabama Institute for Recovery (known generally at the time as “The Recovery Conference”) was held on the campus of the University of Montevallo. At that time, the idea of recovery from

mental illness was a new and radical notion, and one that was typically held in disdain by psychiatrists and others embracing the medical model focused on maintenance and finding the right combination of medications. Office of Peer Programs founding director Joel Slack was an early advocate of the concept of recovery, and over the years his work has gained a national and international following.

But one of the earliest and most prominent national recovery advocates was himself both a consumer and a psychiatrist. His name is Dr. Dan Fisher, and he visited Alabama for one of those early conferences at Montevallo. His words were shocking to those in attendance, but also encouraging.

As we all know, the conference outgrew Montevallo and moved to Shocco Springs to accommodate the 800 or so consumers who have been attending there for the past two and a half decades.

The 2022 AIR once again welcomed Dr. Fisher, whose work in the field of recovery from mental illness has continued with much success. As he did in his first visit to Alabama 30 years ago, Dr. Fisher once again engaged his audience as only he can do.

According to the Fisher’s own advocacy group, he himself is a person who has recovered from schizophrenia. He was hospitalized several times prior to becoming a psychiatrist. He is one of the few psychiatrists in the country who openly discusses his

recovery from mental illness. He is a role model for others who are struggling to recover, and his life, like those of many others, dispels the myth that people do not recover from mental illness.

His academic credentials are impeccable. He received his AB. from Princeton University, his Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin and his M.D. from George Washington University. He is a board-certified psychiatrist who completed his residency at Harvard Medical School. He is presently Executive Director of the National Empowerment Center and a practicing psychiatrist.

As he has now done twice in Alabama, Fisher travels all over the country to conduct workshops, give keynote addresses, teach classes, and organize conferences for consumers/survivors, families, and mental health providers to promote recovery of people labeled with mental illness by incorporating the principles of empowerment. He is a scholar, having carried out research into neurotransmitters at the National Institute of Mental Health and on the ways that people recover. Along with Laurie Ahern, he developed the Empowerment Model of Recovery and the PACE/Recovery program to shift the system to a recovery orientation. He was recognized for this work by being selected for both the Clifford Beers National Mental Health Association Award and the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law’s Advocacy Award.

About the time Fisher first came to Alabama, he founded an advocacy group, the National Empowerment Center (NEC) in 1992.

As he told The Boston Voyager in an interview a few years back, “the major goal of NEC has been to inform the US and the world that, contrary to popular belief, persons with severe mental health conditions can and do recover full lives in the community. We also have developed several training programs to help persons recovering, and their families.”

His talk at the 2022 AIR focused on Emotional CPR, which he describes as “a public health program which teaches any community member how to help another through an emotionally stressful period.”

It was great having Dr. Fisher back with us in Alabama, reminding us that recovery is possible. We hope to see him again and wish him all best in his important and life-changing work.

To learn more, visit his website at [www.power2u.org](http://www.power2u.org)



# 2022 RESPECT AWARD Winners



*The RESPECT Awards are given each year to individuals who are consistently respectful and supportive to individuals with mental illness. RESPECT is an acronym for the characteristics of the recipients of the Respect Award: Responsiveness, Encouraging, Sensitive, Perceptive, Expediting, Caring, Thoughtful.*

**Brandon Todd**

Bryce

**Christi Collins**

NAMI Alabama

**David Thames**

South Highland Presbyterian

**Debbie Painter**

Mountain Lakes

**Julie Burks**

Mountain Lakes

**Marie Holliday**

JBS

**James Hickman (accepting for Darcel King)**

Wellstone Cullman

**Not pictured:**

**Renee Newton**

Bryce

**Freddie Hall**

Bryce









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## ALABAMA DROP-IN AND RECOVERY CENTER LOCATIONS



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Birmingham, AL 35205  
(205) 933-6955

#### **CAHABA CONSUMER AFFAIRS**

302 Franklin Street  
Selma, AL  
(334) 418-6525  
(334) 875-1850

#### **SOMI CLUB**

4351 Midmost Drive  
Mobile, AL 36609  
(251) 342-0261

#### **OUR PLACE**

205 Max Luther Drive,  
Huntsville, AL  
(256) 746-4145

### RECOVERY CENTERS

#### **R.O.S.S. BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY CENTER**

3616 5th Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35222  
(205) 848-2112

#### **R.O.S.S. MARSHALL COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER**

1280 Hwy 431 Suite B  
Boaz, AL 35957  
(256) 281-9008

#### **R.O.S.S. MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY CENTER**

925 Forest Avenue  
Montgomery, AL 36106  
(334) 356-2890

#### **PEOPLE ENGAGED IN RECOVERY**

2534 Government Boulevard  
Mobile, AL 36606  
(251) 219-7811



*To find out more about how to start a drop-in center in your area, call the Office of Peer Programs at 1 (800) 832-0952.*